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ABSTRACT

The Victorian concept that women would sacrifice their femininity by participating in vigorous sports has to some extent been ameliorated, but vestiges of the bias remain today. This attitude was not based on hostility toward women but on overprotectiveness and concern for imagined dangers for the health of women, whose prime function in society was deemed to be childbearing. As women ventured into sedate physical activities and gentle games, attitudes changed gradually, but grave disapproval accompanied every new attempt to broaden their sports horizon. Women's colleges were instrumental in developing wider sport programs for their students by promoting intercollegiate competitions for women. However, as late as the 1960s, there was opposition to women competing in the Olympic Games on the grounds that women's competition was insignificant at best and indecent and unfeminine at worst. Discrimination was evident in the 1970s when Title IX brought legal equality into the collegiate sport scene, and directors of men's programs were forced to think about sharing facilities, money, and even status with women. (JD)

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CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE VICTORIAN PEDESTAL AND THE TOMBOY

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CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE VICTORIAN PEDESTAL AND THE TOMBOY

The American Heritage Dictionary defines a pedestal as "a position of high regard or adoration." (18:965) A 'Tomboy' is defined as "a girl, especially a young girl, who behaves like a spirited boy." (18:1382) The "especially young girl" in the definition is important because it implies the expectation that the girl will outgrow this childish tendency for activity and develop into a "lady." The Victorian period, which began with the reign of Queen Victoria in 1837, more clearly than any era before or since, identified the exacting role of a lady and in so doing created the pedestal for woman and labeled the female who failed to fit this prescribed pattern.

The Victorian period ushered in a half-century of paradoxes and an era of prejudicial discrimination that has followed woman to the present day. Queen Victoria was strong willed and directly involved in the affairs of a powerful state. Yet women of the era---credited to Victorian mores---were expected to be passive, gentle, softspoken, delicate, and unobtrusive. Victorian England was the world's games-master, encouraged the woman in passive sports for her health, and condemned her if she took them seriously. (24:211) While woman was being placed on a pedestal that made her totally dependent, the Woman's Movement was born. But perhaps the greatest paradox of the 18th and early 19th century was that the woman was placed on a pedestal and told it was her special and revered seat of adoration while actually she was assumed to be inferior to the male in almost every category. Studies tying sex-linked characteristics to sex chromosomes in 1901 by Herbert Spencer implied there was physiological evidence to support this assumption. Spencer

concluded "that sex-differences could best be understood by assuming a somewhat earlier-arrest of individual evolution in women than in men; necessitated by the reservation of vital power to meet the cost of reproduction." (4:48) He further clarified that since the male's contribution was limited to fertilization, he had the capacity to develop to a highly-evolved state which allowed abstract reasoning where woman's reasoning had to depend on intuition. Other scientiest as well as lay people of the period supported similar hypotheses that indicated there were biological reasons for woman's inferiority. In response to woman's suffrage, Patrick Geddes, Scottish biologist turned social scientiest wrote, "What was decided among the prehistoric protozoa can not be annulled by act of parliament." (4:53) He also stated that there was no injustice in the female's inferior social position because it was biologically predetermined and was not caused by male conspiracy or society at large. The Victorian values appeared to reign over all of the paradoxes, but how was the pedestal created and why did women allow themselves to remain on this passive perch for so long?

The pedestal was created by husbands and fathers who felt that their women needed protecting from the evils of the world. It also gave men the freedom to select their careers as they desired, the freedom for creativity, the luxery of someone else caring for the home and the personal responsibilities of daily child rearing. This position of reverence relegated the woman to the home and assigned her the feminine role of cooking, cleaning, sewing, and raising children. These feminine ideals were preached from the pulpit, printed in popular magazines, and taught to children from birth onward. Women were trapped with the image since only the unwomanly would speak against femininity---thus the pedestal with its ideas and attitudes of conformity was created and perpetuated throughout the world.

The creation of public opinion became the chief form of social control of women. (7:7) Little girls were taught from birth that "womanhood had as its central virtues submissiveness, domesticity, purity, and piety." Their roles in life were to be "tender mothers, angels of mercy, and keepers of morals." (15:252) The woman's chief goal in life was to catch a desirable husband who could provide for her, be a good father to her children, and give them an honorable name to perpetuate. Since men did the selecting, girls were taught that they must appear attractive, well-dressed, and possessed of feminine wiles so that the male would find them desirable. (5:28) Beauty, dress, manners, and domestic skills became recognized as the key ingredients of femininity. Should she violate any of these mandates, she would topple from the pedestal thus losing her honored status in life and perhaps sacrificing her desired destiny with it. Certainly one of the greatest fears and embarassments to a girl and her family was the failure to find a husband. The literature of the mid-nineteenth century was replete with articles such as "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?"

The Victorian woman was easily moved to tears and fainting over the least provocation. She was wasp-waisted, pale-checked, and the clinging vine type. Fainting fits, spells, and the vapors were a common part of her domestic life. (25:9) Since femininity suggested delicacy, the clothes were designed to further this image. Corsets were worn from three to ten inches smaller than her waist so that the average waist measured from 15 to 18 inches. This gave a dainty appearance but was also the cause of much of the fainting characteristic of the 19th century woman. This only further enhanced her appearance of helplessness and further cultivated the feeling that she needed to be cared for.

American women had never engaged in sport to any extent, but even the

amount of exercise she received decreased from the Colonial period to after the Revolution. (23:108) During the Victorian period some women began to engage in organized sport for the first time, but usually in a very passive style. Even if custom had not deemed sport as inappropriate for women, the heavy, full-length, voluminous dress with numerous petticoats prescribed by the Victorians made activity almost impossible. Limited activity was seen as healthful, but serious competitive sport was seen as horrid and unthinkable. Since the ultimate Victorian goal was to attract a man and to bear a child, sports were seen as antithetical because they did not allow a woman to look her best if the sport required vigor. There was also the belief that the female organs could be damaged if a woman ran or jumped.

Upper class women were first to take up sport and to become leaders in the quest for equality because they had the money to hire servants for the tasks that had kept women at home.

One of the earliest sports to come in vogue for ladies of America was horseback riding, and by 1855 it had become widespread. In Boston and New York numerous riding academies were set up to help women adjust to side saddles. A newspaper editorial commented: "A lot of cynical old fogies ...have recently been startled...by the rushing, galloping, slashing, and dashing exploits of the lady equestrians at the agricultural fairs. This jocund spectacle like everything else that is new...does not suit the still veins of these respectable old goats..... But still the ladies go on riding." (3:245)

Croquet was one of the first accepted sports for women and by 1866 a croquet craze had developed. Other sports that soon appeared and were grudgingly accepted were archery, lawn tennis, golf, bowling, yachting, canoeing, skating, and swimming. Since women could engage in all of these ex-

cept swimming in Victorian clothes, they were seen as gentile. However, to run for a ball in tennis was considered terribly unladylike.

Bicycling for women became popular in the late 1880s and early 1890s when the low, safety bike was introduced, but it was not socially accepted. The tricycle had been accepted in the 1880s for women enthusiasts because Queen Victoria's daughter had ridden one. In fact many wealthy women considered it prestigeous to emulate the Queen's family, so the tricycle became an almost instant boom among the rich. The bicycle, however, was a different matter. Lucas and Smith stated:

> To ride a bicycle was in many ways a challenge to Victorian mores for it created freedom and independence for women where none was sanctioned; it demanded physical exertion when it was thought women could not physiologically stand the strain; and it required radical attire where modesty and conservative clothing was the custom. (15:258)

As late as 1895 a woman stated, "Of course I know there are respectable women who ride, and it is very well for working-girls, (sic) who have no other means of recreation, but I never should wish to see my daughter doing anything of the sort." (1:150)

As sports for women grew in popularity so did the protests against them. The arguments against woman suffrage, entrance to college, women working outside the home, and women participating in competitive athletics all consisted of the same basic reasoning:

> ...it would be useless, expensive, detrimental to the best interests of women, inimical to marriage and otherwise destructive to the home; that women do not want it, that they are not mentally fitted for it, that it would impose upon them greater physical burdens than they could endure, ...that it is against nature. (1:142)

Some of the indirect reproaches carried even more weight:

> Many of the foremost advocates of the cause are not beautiful, that they are careless in dress, that they are old maids, that they are not church members, that they do not eat ice cream with a fork, that they are cranks, and generally speaking, poor, unfashionable and unpopular. (1:142-143)

A common opposition to sport was the belief that it negatively affected sexuality and child birth. Sports were considered virile activities suited only to men, therefore women would be unsexed by engaging in them. "Limited" activity was considered healthful, but vigorous sports were considered a threat to womanliness. Still more and more women dared to hurdle the pedestal society had created and the warnings came from men, physical educators, and the "ladies" who were appalled by their sisters' unbecoming behavior.

Sports or at least exercise programs were provided by most colleges women attended. Basketball became the most acclaimed and controversial sport for women, but Victorian provisions were added to attempt to eliminate rough and vigorous play. For example the ball could not be grabbed from an opponent, it could not be held for more than three seconds, it could be bounced no more than three times, and the court was divided into three sections. In an a tempt to keep basketball educational and of social consequence, prescription cards---which were to be kept attached to the girls' mirrows ---were used by many college instructors to help girls overcome their faults. A typical card would bear the girl's name, the game where the data was collected, and criticisms and recommendations in four areas: physical, mental, social, and esthetic. A typical card had remarks such as this:

> Physical:...throws too hard, runs too hard...
> Mental: Lack of attention, reaction too slow...
> Social: Co-operation is weak...lacking in loyalty-refrain from laying the blame on others for your bad plays...

> Esthetic: Stand badly while waiting for ball; squeal when running; ...open mouth when catching balls. (7:170)

Although the majority of early 20th century physical educators---men and women---were opposed to athletics for women, there were a few arguments in support of athletics. However, even the reasons given in support of women participating, still were negative. Dudley and Kellor suggested that certain mental qualities women lacked, such as "observation, attention, concentration, memory, imagination, initiative, judgment, and will power" could possibly be developed through athletics. In describing how the lack of these qualities affected the girls, they stated:

> When girls begin to play organized games, even as late as in college, they frequently have their minds on something else and lose opportunities; their attention is easily distracted and they "forget to play;" they do not execute commands promptly; they cannot remember rules or instructions; they change their minds half a dozen times while they hold the ball; they imitate rather than originate; or they play wild. (7:27-28)

Several exacting accounts were given by Dudley and Kellor to illustrate the lack of these needed mental, social, and physical qualities in girls and women. One typical story was of an indoor baseball game. A girl hit a long ball that should have been a triple if not a homerun. She rounded first, headed to second, and then suddenly stopped and returned to first base. When she was questioned about this by her coach, she responded by saying that the first baseman was a friend of hers and she remembered something she had been meaning to tell her and she was afraid she might forget it again. Many similar stories were told of women's early exploits in sport.

In 1901 Queen Victoria died ending her long reign, but the strong influence of the Victorian Age was very much alive up to World War I. Even though the number of girls and women engaging in sport was growing each year,

it was generally only those who were brave enough to face the social scorn and the stigma attached to being a tomboy.

The idea persisted that if woman would participate in the proper sports and for the purpose of health she could remain gentile. By the end of the first decade of the new century, the male attitude was that woman should engage in sport only in moderation. "It (was) fine to see her getting health and enjoyment from her outdoor exercise, but not (for her) to devote herself to it with the same passion as the stronger sex." (2:382)

By the 1920s women from all walks of life were engaging in sport although the Victorian values still did not support serious competitive sport. But women seemed braver and more independent during this decade because some of the manicals from the past had been shed. Industrialization had brought women into the work force, womem had finally won the vote, and there had been an extension of property rights.

By the 1930s it was fairly common for industrial concerns such as big insurance companies, large banks, and other large corporations to sponsor sporting events for their employees. This changed the sporting scene for women because now the working class woman composed the largest proportion of athletes rather than the college and socially desirable country club set. Other forces besides industry that were either directly or indirectly promoting women's sports were political organizations, such as Chambers of Commerce, and churches. A final force---that sounds as if it were a 1981 accusation---was stated thusly by Tunis, "Certain sporting organizations which for their own sake desire a womans' championship system with all that this implies, in order that they may extend over women's athletics the power they now exert over athletics for men." (26:29)

Physical educators were thoroughly alarmed as more and more girls and

women were becoming involved in sport, as they saw it as an exploitation of the girls, a danger to their health, a threat to their femininity, and as a movement harmful to the masses in women's physical education. The sports movement for women had grown increasingly strong in the 1920s, and the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation had been formed in 1924 with Mrs. Herbert Hoover in the leadership role with the "Old Guard" women physical educators forming the executive committee. The women did not sanction the competitive athletic movement and were determined to control women's sports so that they would not become copies of men's programs with their accompanying evils.

Play Days emerged as a solution to competition for college women, but this controlled only one sector of the population. It was the industrially sponsored sports and the Olympics that seemed most abhorrent to these physical educators. In the 1928 Olympics women had competed for the first time in track and field events. Back in 1895 Vassar College held a field day, the first college to do so, and "they were immediately chastised." (10:13) Field events definitely did not fit the image of femininity then, and track and field events still did not fit the Victorian ideals preached by the physical educators of the 1920s and '30s. The most catastropic of the events of the Amesterdam Games was the 800 meter race in which eleven "wretched" women (as most athletic women seemed to be referred to in the literature of this period) competed with five dropping out before the finish, five collapsing after reaching the tape, and the remaining starter fainting after reaching the dressing room.

This unfortunate event seemed to prove the fears of the physical educators. In 1929 the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation adopted a resolution protesting the competition of women in the

Olympic Games. The resolution noted that the Women's Division could support only types of programs which promoted "activities suited to girls as girls." (22:82) They further resolved that such activities as a festival to include singing, dancing, and music; luncheons; banquets; and other appropriate functions be held for women in place of athletic participation. Pierre de Coubertin was written in an attempt to secure his aid in prohibiting women competitors, plus 115 National and International Olympic Committee members were sent a copy in April, 1930 of the letter that the Women's Division had penned to the President of the International Olympic Congress in its quest to at least get track and field omitted from the 1932 Olympics. (22:55-56) Even though they failed in their major effort, they were steadfast in their beliefs and in their determination to continue their struggle to protect their girls as can be seen by this quote from the Women's Division.

> Each generation must be taught from the beginning what is desirable in athletics and sports and what is not. Changing public opinion is a slow process and educational pressure must be strong if it is to counteract adverse influences in the environment. (22:67)

Leaders such as Blanche Trilling, J. Anna Norris, Helen McKinstry, Ethel Perrin, Agnes Wayman, Mabel Lee, and others instilled their Victorian beliefs in their students who in turn continued this philosophy with their students. The male physical educators supported their female colleagues. Frederick Rand Rogers, in 1930, made a supporting statement that was as Victorian as the thinking had been over fifty years earlier:

> Life should be a process whereby the unique prepotencies of each individual are protected, developed and finally brought to blossom and fruition. For girls and women this means the development of all those traits which are necessary to attract the most worthy fathers for their children, provide the most healthful physiques for child-bearing and build the most

> maternal environment and social behavior patterns. Intense forms of physical and psychic conflicts, of which athletics provide the best example in modern life, and of which Olympic games provide the extreme type, tend to destroy girls' physical and psychic charm and adaptability for motherhood. (21:77)

The Victorian ideals persisted that a woman sacrificed her femininity when she engaged in athletics. Paul Gallico, well known sports writer, wrote in 1936 that it was a lady's business to look beautiful and that she could not do it and participate in active sports. He also made a mockery of women's skill and general physical limitations. Mr. Gallico showed how much he understood women and their ability when he stated, "If women played basketball under men's rules, they would be taken away on strechers in five minutes." (9:13)

Women's varsity sports continued to be fought by physical educators from the 1930s through the 1950s. In 1941 the first national tournament for women was held and the National Association of Directors of Physical Education for College Women, the National Section on Women's Athletics (which was the former Women's Division, National Amateur Athletic Federation), and the Athletic Conference of American College Women fought it being allowed. (16:42) Finally in 1960 the Women's Platform conceeded the need of the highly skilled girl, but pressure on winning, gate receipts, extensive travel, scholarships and recruiting continued as their line of demarcation for approving competitive athletics for women. But haven't these things been at the heart of all conflicting philosophies for educational athletics regardless of sex? Women were not fighting only these problems for approval though, there were still the Victorian mores that crept into the argument.

An article appeared in the New York Times in August 1960 titled "Venus Wasn't a Shot-Putter." (8:14, 78-79) The author was making an attack on the

women athletes who had competed in the Olympic Games that summer. After hypothesizing that women's entry into the Olympics was signaling a possible decline in civilization, he proceeded to attack the women who were destroying "The Image." The writer stated, "Sports for women should be kept in the Victorian age where no one took it seriously. In the hard competition of the highly promoted athletics, such as the Olympics, there is no place for women unless they no longer want to be women." (8:14)

A position paper, claiming it took a middle of the road position, appeared in a 1969 Journal of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, perhaps modeled on Mabel Lee's 1930 paper on the pros and cons of athletics for women, in which the author stated: "The changing sex role includes intercollegiate competition for women. Personally, I do not think the world needs a substancial increase in highly aggressive, competitive, tough-minded women." (14:75) After listing some reasons in support of athletics, the author's first argument against women's athletics was: "Our culture likes feminine looking and acting girls. Intercollegiate competition often toughens them and makes them social misfits." (14:78) This "middle of the road" paper was about to fall off in the right ditch!

The seventies failed to drop the curtain on the Victorian ideals, but certainly more organizational support had come to the aid of women's sport and perhaps the attitudes softened somewhat toward the Tomboy. Competition for girls and women underwent phenomenal growth during the seventies, but "it took pressure from the Olympics, professional women's sports, and federal legislation" for it to happen. (15:42) Guttman stated, "The prejudice against women athletes derived from Victorian attitudes about porcelain-doll femininity rather than from the fearful kind of discrimination that barred blacks from competition with whites. It was not direct hostility

against women so much as overprotectiveness." (12:34) Certainly that was true from mid-nineteenth century through the 1960s because most opponents simply thought of w. en's competition as insignificant at best and indecent and unfeminine at worst. Fearful discrimination came alive in the 1970s when Title IX started bringing legal equality into the picture and the directors of mens' programs were forced to think of sharing facilities, money, and even status with the women. Perhaps these are even further obstacles that are being used in an attempt to prop the leaning Victorian pedestal up so that it will not completely fall.

In the South, where women have been placed higher on the pedestal than any other section, we see less lean in the pedestal. Gruver stated, "Southerners (carry) the idealistic, sentimental worship of white womanhood to almost religious heights." (11:335) Femininity and sport are still seen as strange bedfellows to many Southerners. In the mid-nineteen-seventies when the University of Alabama first gave scholarships for women's athletics, the announcement with pictures of these first recipients did not appear on the sports page of the Birmingham Post Herald, but on the society page.

For one hundred years women have lived with the pedestal or its remaining ideals. For many the pedestal seemed an obstacle too great to jump, and they therefore found it safer, more confortable, and more acceptable to approach sports as a spectator or from a support role such as pom pom girl or cheerleader. Other girls and women have seen the pedestal as a challenge ---a dare to be taken. Those who have dared to jump the pedestal have often encountered scorn, but they have also found the joy of sport has usually made the effort well worthwhile.

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